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TAGS: MARR PGOV PINR PREL CH TW KS JA

SUBJECT: PACOM COMMANDER KEATING AND DEFMIN KYUMA DISCUSS CHINA'S MILITARY

Classified By: Ambassador J. Thomas Schieffer. Reasons 1.4 (B) (D)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: PACOM Commander Admiral Timothy Keating told Defense Minister Kyuma May 15 that his efforts to engage China's military leaders will not come at the expense of a strong U.S.-Japan alliance. Stopping in Tokyo on his return from Beijing, Keating said Chinese officials claimed their military -- including the build-up of missiles facing Taiwan -- is defensive in nature, but had been evasive on the aims of military modernization. PLA counterparts insisted the recent anti-satellite (ASAT) test was a "scientific experiment" and talked informally of interest in developing an aircraft carrier, Keating relayed. Kyuma voiced concern over signs of a disconnect between the ruling Chinese Communist Party and the PLA revealed by the ASAT test, echoing comments made by Foreign Minister Aso to Chairman of the Joint Chiefs General Pace in March. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) PACOM Commander Admiral Timothy Keating met Minister of Defense Fumio Kyuma May 15 to discuss his May 10-14 visit to China. Keating assured Kyuma that his efforts to engage Chinese military leadership would not detract from the ongoing effort to strengthen the U.S.-Japan alliance. Chinese officials seemed to understand this, he noted.

China's carrier ambitions, ASAT test

¶3. (C) Chinese interlocutors emphasized to ADM Keating that their military modernization, which includes the buildup of missiles within range of Taiwan, is primarily defensive in nature, and downplayed Chinese military technology by claiming they "would never catch (up to) the U.S." On the recent anti-satellite (ASAT) test, Keating told Kyuma that, when asked, Chinese officials called the event a "scientific experiment", and dismissed concerns about the leftover debris field as overblown. Admiral Keating said he had strongly challenged this explanation, pointing out that the test had raised concern in many countries and was a "confusing" signal, inconsistent with China's stated interest in the peaceful use of outer space.

¶4. (C) Senior People's Liberation Army (PLA) officers, in informal comments, were candid about the attraction of having an aircraft carrier, said Keating, although they had been evasive when asked if China was seeking to develop one. Admiral Keating quoted one Chinese officer as saying a carrier was important as a "symbol of power" and assessed that the PLA Navy is intent on pursuing a carrier program.

Kyuma: worry over CCP-PLA split

¶5. (C) Kyuma said he is concerned over signs of a disconnect between the Chinese Communist Party leadership and the PLA. The anti-satellite test and the provocative deployments of Chinese submarines suggest that the PLA is becoming more autonomous and unilateral in its actions, he said. (NOTE: Foreign Minister Aso made similar points to Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Pace following the latter's March visit to China). Admiral Keating replied that he had not detected any rift between the military and the Party during his visit, but agreed that such a development would be a concern.

Taiwan, Beijing Olympics

¶6. (C) Every Chinese military official he met with raised the issue of Taiwan, noting their concern about a possible increase in tensions in the run-up to elections on the island, said Keating. Kyuma replied that, so long as the independence movement in Taiwan did not become too pronounced, he expected the recent improvement in Japan-China relations to hold steady and cross-strait violence will remain unlikely.

¶7. (C) Beyond military topics, ADM Keating shared that the Chinese seem especially proud of their role in the Six-Party Talks and the upcoming Olympics. His Chinese counterparts expressed their hope for progress in the Six Party Talks, and a peaceful resolution to the problems with North Korea. Similarly, the Chinese have high hopes for the Beijing Olympics as a vehicle for their entry onto the world stage, he added.

¶8. (U) This message has been cleared by Admiral Keating.
SCHIEFFER